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FICTION

Mrs. Huggins's Hun

By STACY AUMONIER

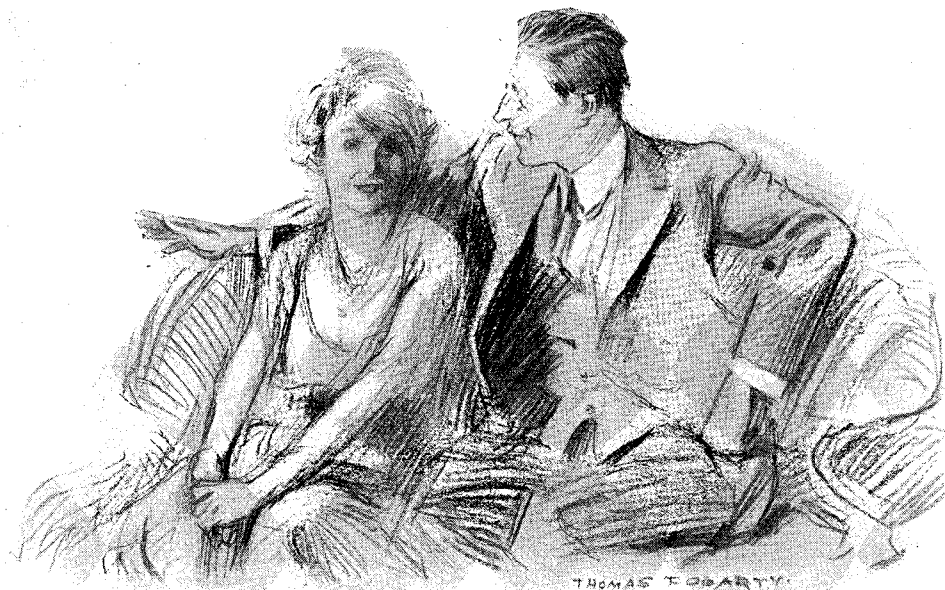
Illustrations by Thomas Fogarty



RS. HUGGINS'S manifestation of antipathy to her prospective son-in-law was a thing to be seen to be believed. She bridled at the sight of him. She lashed him with her tongue on every conceivable occasion. She snubbed, derided, buffeted him. She could find no virtue in his appearance, manners, or character. She hated him with consuming wrath, and did not hesitate to flaunt her animadversion in his face or in the face of her friends or of her daughter Maggie. Maggie was Mrs. Huggins's only child, and Mrs. Huggins was a widow running a boarding-house in Camden Town. Maggie was her ewe-lamb, the light of her existence, whose simple, unsophisticated character had been suddenly, within two months, entirely demoralized by the advent of this meteoric youth. Quentin Livermore had appeared from the blue, when Mrs. Huggins was very distracted at her unlet rooms, and had applied for her first floor, for which he offered a good price. He was a weak-faced, flashy, old-young man, anything between thirty and forty. He dressed gorgeously, lived sumptuously, and was employed in some government department. He was in the house less than twenty-four hours when he began to make love to Maggie,

and it was the change in Maggie which particularly annoyed Mrs. Huggins. Maggie was a stenographer in a local store, earning good money, and a simple, natural girl; but when Mr. Livermore appeared on the scene, she began to speak with an affected lisp, to wear fal-lals and gewgaws, and to do her hair in strange bangs and buns. In a few days they were going out for strolls together after supper. In a fortnight he was taking her to theaters and cinemas. In six weeks they were to all intents and purposes engaged. At least, they said they were engaged. Mrs. Huggins said they were not. In fact, she told her friend Mrs. O'Neil, in the private bar of the Staff of Life, that she would "see that slobberin' shark damned" before he should go off with her Mag.

But on the morning when this story begins Mrs. Huggins was in a very perturbed state. It was a pleasant June morning, and she had finished her housework. She sat down to enjoy a well-merited glass of stout and to review the situation. Maggie had gone away for a few days' holiday, to stay with some cousins in Essex, and the evening before she had left there had been a terrible rum-pus. Maggie had come home with her hair *bobbed*, looking like some wretched office-boy. After Mrs. Huggins had vented her



"HE WAS IN THE HOUSE LESS THAN TWENTY-FOUR HOURS WHEN HE BEGAN TO MAKE LOVE TO MAGGIE"

opinion upon this contemptible metamorphosis and had cried a little, she went out, and, returning late in the evening, found her Maggie lolling on a couch in Mr. Livermore's room, smoking cigarettes and drinking port wine! It was a climax in every sense, and to add to her misfortune the Bean family, who occupied the third and a part of the fourth floor, suddenly left to go and live at Mendon, near the aeroplane works, where they were nearly all employed.

Mrs. Huggins had now no lodgers except the insufferable Mr. Livermore. It would be impossible to keep up her refined establishment on the twenty-five shillings a week that Livermore paid her without breaking into her hard-earned savings. But this fact did not disturb Mrs. Huggins so much as the difficulty of furthering a more ambitious project, which was nothing less than to get rid of Mr. Livermore while Maggie was away.

Mrs. Huggins blew the froth off the stout, took a long draft, wiped her mouth on her apron, and then continued to ponder upon the problem. No light came to her, and she was about to repeat the operation when she was disturbed by the clatter of a four-wheeled cab driving up to the front door. She looked up through the

kitchen window and beheld a strange sight. The cab was laden with a most peculiar collection of trunks and boxes, and, standing by the front doorstep, was a fat man holding a cage with a canary in one hand and a violin-case in the other.

"Ah, a new lodger at last!" thought Mrs. Huggins, and she slipped off her apron and hurried up-stairs. When she opened the front door, she noticed that the fat man had thick spectacles, a Homburg hat much too small for his head, and a tuft of yellow beard between two of his innumerable chins. He put down the canary and removed his hat.

"Have I the honor to speak to the honored Mrs. Huggins?" he said.

"Mrs. Huggins is my name," answered that lady.

"Ah, so? May I a word with you?" He walked deliberately into the hall and once more set down the canary and the violin. He then produced a sheaf of papers.

"I have been regommended. May I have the pleasure of your hospitality for some time?"

"I *have* some rooms to let," replied Mrs. Huggins, evasively.

He bowed, and blew his nose.

"I must eggspain in ze first place, goot lady, I am a Sherman."

There was a perceptible pause while the two eyed each other; then Mrs. Huggins said explosively:

"Oh, I can't take no dirty 'Uns in my 'ouse."

It might perhaps be mentioned at this point that the speech of Mrs. Huggins was always characterized by directness and force. The Hun bowed once more and replied:

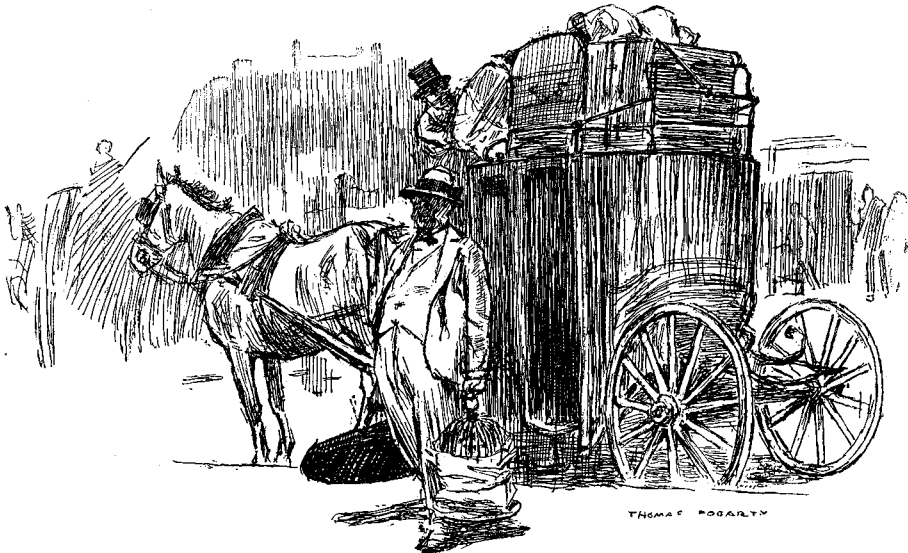
"The matter is already at your disposition, good lady. I state my case. If you gan consider it, I gan assure you that all my papers are in order. The London poliss officers know me. I report to zem. I have my passports, my permits. Everything in order. I pay you vell."

Mrs. Huggins blinked at the German and blinked at the cab. The cab looked somewhat imposing, with its large trunks, and the German's face was eminently homely and kind. Her eye wandered from it to the canary, and then along the wall

in Hackney had been destroyed by fire. He had been offered an excellent position at a colleague's in Camden Town, the said colleague being sick and in urgent need of help. He was simple in his requirements; a bed, a breakfast, occasionally a supper. His name was Schmidt, Karl Schmidt. He was willing to pay three pounds a week for the rooms, payment in advance. He had endless "regommendations." Mrs. Huggins found herself following him up and down stairs, helping him in with trunks, and listening abstractedly. In a vague way she took to the Hun, and her mind was active with a scheme to use him for her own ends. All the trunks were installed in the third-floor rooms, and she observed him take out an old string purse and say to the cabman:

"Now have we all the paggages installed. So."

He paid the cabman, came into the hall, and shut the door. He walked ponderous-



"A FOUR-WHEELED CAB DRIVING UP TO THE FRONT DOOR"

to the hall stand, and came to a stop at Livermore's felt hat. She equivocated.

"What sort of rooms do you want?" she said.

At this compromise of tone the Hun assumed the arbitrariness of his race. He put his things down on the hall chairs and became voluble and convincing. He was a watch- and clock-maker. His business

ly up-stairs, humming to himself. Mrs. Huggins heard him busy with bunches of keys, opening and shutting trunks and putting things away in drawers. The whole thing had happened so suddenly that Mrs. Huggins still could not decide her course of action. She went down-stairs and put some potatoes on to boil. After a time she heard the Hun coming heavily down to

the hall again. She went up to meet him. He waved three one-pound treasury-notes in the air and placed them on the hall-table.

"Mrs. Huggins," he said, "please to be goot enough to allow me to present you with zese. I shall be very gomfortable here. It is all satisfactory. I go now to my colleague in pizness. Then I go to eggsplain to the poliss. It is all in order. Yes. I shall not be returnable since zis evening, perhaps eight o'gloch, perhaps nine o'gloch. In any vay, I gom back before ten o'gloch. Oh, yes, before ten o'gloch." He laughed boisterously, bowed, and went out. Mrs. Huggins stared at the door, then went to the window and watched him cross the street.

"Well, I 'm demned!" she muttered to herself, and fingered the three crisp treasury-notes in her hand. She went up to his room and touched all his trunks and small effects. Most of his things were locked

up. She said, "Cheep! cheep!" to the canary three times, and then went downstairs and had her dinner.

And that afternoon Mrs. Huggins became very busy. In apron, and with bare arms and a broom, she worked as she had not worked for months. The details may be spared, but the principal effect must be observed that by six-thirty that evening all Herr Fritz's luggage and effects had been installed in the *first-floor* room, and all Mr. Quentin Livermore's property had been piled up in a heap in the hall!

We shall also take the liberty of pass-

ing over the details of the interview which took place between Mrs. Huggins and Mr. Livermore when he came in at seven o'clock that evening on his way to change his clothes and go down West to dine. It need only be said that the accumulated antipathy of their two months' intercourse reached a climax. There may have been faults on both sides, but Mrs. Huggins

was in one of her most masterful moods, and she was, moreover, armed with a brush. Mr. Livermore had only a cane and his superciliousness. He was, indeed, rather frightened, and his sneering comments on her personal appearance had little sting. His ultimate decision to leave at once and go over to Mrs. Hayward's, so that he would still be where Maggie would find him, and where, in any case, it was tolerably clean, and the landlady knew how to cook, was the only shaft which told at all, for Mrs. Hayward and Mrs.

Huggins were noto-

rious rivals. In the end a cab was secured, and by eight o'clock the triumphant Mrs. Huggins had slammed the door on her hated lodger, with a final threat that "if she saw 'im going about with 'er gal she 'd bang 'im over the chops with a broom."

So excited and exhilarated was Mrs. Huggins by her victory that when he had gone, she felt it incumbent upon her to dash down to the Staff of Life for ten minutes to get a glass of beer and to unburden herself to Mrs. O'Neil. Not finding her friend there, she had two glasses of beer and hurried back. On arriving



"HE PUT DOWN THE CANARY AND REMOVED HIS HAT"

at the corner of her street she had another surprise. A taxi was standing outside her door, and a short gentleman with a dark mustache and pointed beard was banging on her door and looking up at the windows.

"Gawd's truth! What is it now?" muttered Mrs. Huggins, hurrying up.

On approaching the stranger, he turned and looked at her.

"Well, what is it?" she asked.

The gentleman smiled very charmingly and made an elaborate bow.

"Ah," he exclaimed, "so at last I have the pleasure of addressing the charming Madame Huggins! Madame, my compliments. May I address you on a professional matter?"

He slipped a visiting-card into her hand on which was printed, "M. Jules de la Roche, 29B rue Dormi, Paris."

Mrs. Huggins stared at the card and opened her front door.

"O my Gawd!" was all that occurred to her to remark. The Frenchman—for so he apparently was—bowed again, and followed her into the hall.

"You must pardon my precipitate manners," he said. "I am very pressed. I am in London on business connected with the French Red Cross. I have a peculiar dislike to hotels, and a lady I met in the train was kind enough to refer me to your charming *pension*. I shall owe you a thousand thanks if you will be kind enough to allow me to enjoy your hospitality if only for a few days, or perhaps weeks. Whatever you can do—" He waved his arms and looked quickly, almost beseechingly, round the little hall.

Mrs. Huggins wiped her mouth on her apron, and stared at the Frenchman.

"Well, this is a rum go!" she remarked at last. "I've got a German on the first floor, a nice, quiet feller. And now you're a Frenchy! Now, look here; if I take you in, I'm not goin' to 'ave any fightin' goin' on. D' you understand that?"

The Frenchman gave her one of his quick glances and laughed.

"My dear madame," he exclaimed, "what ees eet to me? I am of entirely

a gentle disposition, and if your friend is of gentle disposition, vy should we quarrel?"

"'E's no *friend* of mine," interjected Mrs. Huggins. "'E's a 'Un, but 'e's a lodger. I don't make friends of my lodgers, but I treats 'em fair. If I do the fair and square thing by *them*, I expect 'em to do the fair and square by *me*; but I won't 'ave the place turned into a bear-garden by a lot of foreigners."

M. de la Roche threw back his head and laughed.

"An admirable sentiment, *chère madame*. Then it is settled. I take my effects immediately to—vich floor did you mention?"

"I did n't mention no floor," replied Mrs. Huggins, "but if you like to leave it at that, I dessay I can fix you up on the third, and the terms will be three pounds a week."

The face of Mrs. Huggins was perfectly straight when she demanded this extortionate sum, neither did it show any evidence of surprise when the Frenchman quite avidly agreed, and immediately paid her three pounds down in advance. He seemed a gay and companionable gentleman. He had only one valise, which he ran up-stairs with. He paid the cabman a sum which seemed to leave that gentleman so speechless he could not even express his thanks. He chatted to Mrs. Huggins merrily about the weather, the war, the food problems, the difficulties of running a lodging-house. He was intensely sympathetic about various minor ailments of which Mrs. Huggins was a victim. He listened attentively to the history of various former lodgers, but beyond eliciting the fact that the German occupied the first floor, he showed no particular interest in his fellow-lodger. He explained that he had considerable correspondence to attend to that evening, so he did not purpose to go out; but if Mrs. Huggins could scramble him a couple of eggs on toast and make him a cup of tea, he would be eternally grateful.

Mrs. Huggins was a good cook. It was a matter she took a keen personal delight

in. She would neglect her housework in order to produce some savory trifle for a pet lodger. On this occasion she surprised M. de la Roche by serving him with a large ham omelet and an apple tart.

"After yer long journey, you 'll want a bite of somethin'," she explained.

Any apprehensions she entertained that her house was to be turned into a beer-garden by a lot of quarrelsome foreigners were early dissipated. At half-past nine that evening Herr Schmidt came in and went up to his room. Ten minutes later M. Jules de la Roche, coming downstairs, beheld the canary in its cage on a chair outside Herr Fritz's door.

"*Ah, le petit bossu!*" he remarked.

The door was ajar, and Herr Fritz stepped out.

"*Bonsoir, monsieur,*" he said in his deep-chested voice. "Are you interested in canaries?"

The Frenchman smiled in a friendly manner.

"My sympathies always go out to the caged, monsieur," he replied. "But what a pretty fellow! Am I right in suggesting that he is of the Belgian species?"

"No, sir," said the German. "Although they vas somet'ing similiar, zis is ze Scottish."

"Pardon," replied the Frenchman. "I ought to have known. I have lived at Terceira, in the Azores, where one hears canaries singing in the open all day. Eet ees entrancing."

"Gom inzide," said Herr Schmidt and sighed, "and let us talk. I am lonely."

Mrs. Huggins overheard this conversation from the hall beneath, and she smiled contentedly. It was a triumph, a bolt from the blue. She had ousted the wretched Livermore, and like manna from heaven these two gentle, simple foreigners, who were willing to pay through the neck, had dropped right into her lap. Her conscience mildly smote her that she had demanded so much from Herr Schmidt, but a rapid mental calculation had decided that he must pay at least double as a penalty for being a Hun, but at the same time it would n't be fair to him to take another

lodger for less. She had been, in any case, prepared to bargain, and to reduce considerably her terms, and had been quite nonplussed at not being called upon to do so. So far, so good; but the difficulty of detaching the wretched Livermore from her Maggie still remained to be accomplished, for Maggie was to return the day after to-morrow, and Livermore would be sure to be always hanging about the street.

In the meantime the conversation between the two foreigners up-stairs never flagged. They became extremely friendly. The violin case laid the foundation for an intimate chat on technic, personality, Bach, nationality. From these easily devolved discussions on politics, religion, and hence, inevitably, "this regrettable war." Each man was patently sensitive of the other's feelings. They talked of everything in the abstract, and avoided as far as possible the personal equation. They found each other extremely interesting, but there arrived a point when each was aware that the other was fencing. Herr Schmidt produced a bottle of whisky and a syphon of soda, but he could not persuade M. de la Roche to partake of more than one glass. It was nearly twelve o'clock when the Frenchman suddenly said:

"Well, my dear Herr Schmidt, I have had a most entrancing evening. I suggest that you dine vif me to-morrow evening. I have made de happy discovery dat our good Mrs. Huggins is a most excellent chef. Why should ve two lonely bachelors not share our meal?"

"I gannot gonzidder anyt'ing more delightful," replied Herr Schmidt. "Only I insist that you dine vif me in my room. I glaim preëminence as ze first-floor lodger." He laughed boisterously, and after further mildly disputing the matter, it was arranged accordingly.

The dinner which Herr Schmidt prevailed upon Mrs. Huggins to supply the following evening in honor of his friend M. de la Roche was of such a nature that not only had the like never been served in Mrs. Huggins's household, but probably never before in the whole environment of Camden Town. In the first place, there



"HE WAS, INDEED, RATHER FRIGHTENED"

were oysters and grape-fruit, soup, a baked bream, a roast fowl and several vegetables; a lemon-curd tart, Welsh rarebit, and grapes, the whole mellowed with the exhilarating complement of Italian vermouth, sparkling Moselle, and a very old brandy, to say nothing of coffee, cigars, and the dazzling conversation of the two gentlemen.

The preparation of these alluring delicacies occupied Mrs. Huggins nearly the whole of the day—a day which was marred only by a regrettable scuffle in the early morning. It happened at about half-past eight. Mrs. Huggins was at work in the kitchen when she heard a commotion going on up in the hall. Hurrying up-stairs, she found M. de la Roche arguing with Quentin Livermore. The Frenchman turned to her.

"Who is dis man, madam? I know him

not. He comes into the house unbidden."

And Livermore cut in:

"I 've come to collect my letters. You 're not going to keep my letters from me."

Mrs. Huggins seized her broom and cried out:

"You get out, you dirty thief and black-mailer!"

She experienced no difficulty in routing Mr. Livermore and sending him flying up the street, and after his departure she told the whole story to M. de la Roche, who kept on repeating:

"*Nom de Dieu!* how shocking! *Quel perfide!* What a villain!" He was almost in tears.

The rest of the day passed quietly. Both the gentlemen went out soon after breakfast. Herr Schmidt did not return till seven-thirty in the evening, in time for the dinner. M. de la Roche came in

at five o'clock, and persuaded Mrs. Huggins to go to the nearest haberdasher's and obtain two clean shirts for him, as, owing to his imperfect knowledge of the English tongue, he was unable to obtain the sort he required. She returned in half an hour, and M. de la Roche thanked her profusely. At eight o'clock precisely he presented himself in Herr Schmidt's room, wearing an ill-fitting evening dress peculiar to Frenchmen. Herr Schmidt was also in evening dress of an ill-fitting kind peculiar to Germans. They bowed, and shook hands cordially.

"I am indeed fortunate," remarked Herr Schmidt, "in a city so desolate as London, and in a quarter so *traurig* as this, to find so sympathetic and charming a fellow-lodger."

"*Tout au contraire*," replied the Frenchman. "The good fortune is exclusively to me. Ah, this London! was there ever a city so *abaissé*, so *triste*?"

"Never, never," retorted Herr Schmidt.

"Now, let me offer you a glass of goot

vermuth, and then we will taste these excellent oysters circumscribe while the good Frau Huggins prepares the soup."

The two men sat down, and toasted each other solemnly.

"Doubtless you have considerably traveled, my friend?" remarked Herr Schmidt as he disposed of his second dozen oysters.

"I would not venture to address myself as a traveler," replied M. de la Roche. "True, I have lived in the Azores, and I am at home in Egypt, Morocco, Spain, France, and Italy. But a traveler, *parbleu!* it means something more than that. And you, Herr Schmidt, have you adventured far?"

"No; my fatherland—pardon me speaking of my fatherland in these delicate times—my fatherland has occupied me for most a long while, and this dear England, which I love almost as much as it occupies me too already. For the rest, a little Dutchman, a little Swede, a little of the sea; I am a citizen of the wide, wide world, is not it?"

"Does not seem curious," remarked M. de la Roche as Mrs. Huggins brought in the soup; "it appears mostly that you visit countries I have not visited, and I visit countries you not visit. Strange!"

"So it happens most nearly always. Now I wish much to go to America. And you?"

"Ah, America! Yes, most interesting."

"You do not go to America?"

The German looked at the Frenchman with his mild eyes, and M. de la Roche shook his head.

"No, no; I don't like," he rejoined. "It does not call to me. Interesting, yes, *très intéressant*; but to me too *matériel*. Life to me must be romance. Romance first, romance second, romance all the time."

"Even in Camden Town?" queried Herr Schmidt, slicing the bread down the center. Then he laughed. "Well, after all, why not? It is to be found, your romance, even in material things. I love material things, and I find them romantic. It is a figure of the mind. Allow me to offer you some of this sparkling wine, if it does not to drink a German wine you disgust."



"HE SLIPPED A VISITING-CARD INTO HER HAND"

"I am a Cat'olic," replied M. de la Roche, "bot' in my religion and in appreciation of goot t'ings. To your goot healt', Herr Schmidt, and happy days ven peace shall come."

"Happy days!" solemnly replied the German. "May the world vonce more to reason gom!"

The wine flowed freely. The fowl was done to a nicety. The conversation never flagged. Mrs. Huggins enjoyed the dinner almost as much as her two lodgers. They were the softest things she had ever encountered in her professional career. Visions of a bounteous time despite the war floated before her mind's eye. She even decided that she would treat them fairly and squarely. She would not take advantage of their innocence; but there would be a steady accumulation of "things left over," which were her natural perquisites. She was indeed surveying the remnants of the very solid fowl, as it reclined on a dish in the hall, and was mentally performing the skilful operation of "trimming it up" without altering the general effect of the mass, when she heard Herr Schmidt's door open and shut, and he came down the stairs quietly. In the hall he produced a large timepiece from his waistcoat-pocket, and resting one hand commandingly on her shoulder, he said:

"Mrs. Huggins, in seven minutes precisely two shentlemens vill gall to visit me. Ask no questions. Show them straight up to my room, open ze door, and say, 'Mr. Skinner and Mr. Trout.' Then close ze door and retire till I gall you vonce more again."

He gave her no opportunity to reply to these instructions, but returned to his room. As the door opened she heard him crying out:

"Pardon me, dear Monsieur de la Roche. You must try von of my Contadinos. I gan really regommend them. I brought zem myself from Amsterdam the year pefore zis distressful var."

"A thousand t'anks, my dear Herr Schmidt. It is a luxury I seldom allow myself dese days."

The gentle flow of these suave pleas-

antries reached their appointed crisis. Each man lay back in an easy-chair, with the divine Contadino between his teeth. On the table stood the little glasses filled with the old brandy.

"Life may be very pleasant and grassifying in the midst of vickedness and sin," murmured Herr Schmidt.

"*C'est très vrai*," replied M. de la Roche. "It does not do even to t'ink of dese t'ings all de time."

"Friendship is vat I value beyond all else. M. de la Roche, to your goot healt'!"

As each man raised the little glass, the door opened, and Mrs. Huggins announced:

"Mr. Trinner and Mr. Snout."

Two stolid-looking gentlemen entered, and Mrs. Huggins retired.

Herr Schmidt removed the cigar from his mouth and said:

"Good evening, gentlemen," and then without changing his position, and in a voice without any trace of German accent, he addressed M. de la Roche as follows:

"Ephraim Hyems, I have the honor to arrest you on an extraordinary warrant issued by the United States Government for embezzlement in connection with the Pennsylvania Small Arms Trust, and moreover with an attempt to convey certain information to an enemy agent in this country, under Article 36 of the Defense of the Realm Act."

The Frenchman leaned forward, and clutching the arms of the chair, he gave vent to a very un-Frenchified expression. He said:

"Gee-whiz!"

"It hardly required that native vernacular to convince me that you were not a Frenchman. As a matter of fact, I have lived for many years in Paris, and if I may say so without giving offense, Monsieur de la Roche, your French never convinced me at all."

The pseudo-Frenchman sat here apparently dazed. At length he said:

"Professionally speaking, Herr Schmidt, it is regrettable that our rôles were not reversed. It is true that I know little

French, but I happen to have spent some years in Germany. I studied medicine at Leipsic. Your German is appalling. It would not deceive a London policeman. In this present case I am fully prepared to throw up my arms and to cry 'Kamerad!' only I would ask you, as a last request, whether you or your assistants would kindly extract my pocket-book from my breast-pocket, and examine my card and any other papers you or they may find. And, finally, whether you will allow me to finish this glass of very excellent brandy."

Herr Schmidt bowed.

"Trout," he said, "turn out all his pockets and hand me his pocket-book. In the meantime the gentleman can enjoy his last plunge of dissipation."

The solemn-looking sub-inspector did as he was told, and handed Herr Schmidt the pocket-book. That gentleman turned it over slowly and drew out a card. When his eyes alighted on it, his face expressed sudden amazement, and then he threw back his head and laughed explosively.

"Cyrus G. Vines!" he exclaimed. "Cyrus G. Vines of the New York police! It's quite true we've been expecting Mr. Cyrus G. Vines for some time on this Hyems case. Holy Christopher! and are you really Cyrus G. Vines? Well, I'm damned! Also, I'm glad, if it's true. We shall require a little more evidence on that count. But in the meantime will you kindly explain your presence in Mrs. Huggins's house in Camden Town?"

Mr. Vines grinned. There was no longer any of the Frenchman about him. In fact, he carefully removed the little tuft of beard and mustache of the conventional stage Gaul. He puffed at his cigar and said:

"Unless my calculations are at fault, you will be Inspector Hartrigg. It is quite true my duty was to report right away to Scotland Yard. But it happens I'm a young man, Inspector, and I have ambitions to make good. I arrived at Liverpool last Friday; the boat was thirty hours ahead of time. I just thought I'd buzz around for a day or two on my own and

see whether I could n't get the case a bit straighter to hand over. I got wise that this Hyems galoot was boarding on the first floor of this shanty. I tracked him here and found him disguised as a Hun! Do you take me?"

The "Hun" pulled at the little tuft of beard between his chins, and twirled his genuine mustache.

"Well, this is a nice go!" he said. "Between us we have missed the quarry. I confess I only traced him to this house. I did n't know which floor. But when I discovered that there was only one other lodger, and he a Frenchman, the case seemed obvious."

"Say, Inspector," interjected the American, "what was your idea of this German stunt?"

"Hyems has been further suspected of dealing with a German agent, as I have told you. I thought a nice friendly German might draw him out. That is all. It is quite true I don't know German well, although I spent a long time in France. Now, tell me what was your idea of the French stunt, Vines?"

"A Frenchman enjoys certain prerogatives," Vines smilingly replied. "He can be talkative, inquiring, sympathetic. He can even make inquiries concerning 'things of the heart' without giving offense. Now, Mrs. Huggins is a very charming and sympathetic woman, and she has a daughter, I believe, although I've never had the pleasure of meeting her."

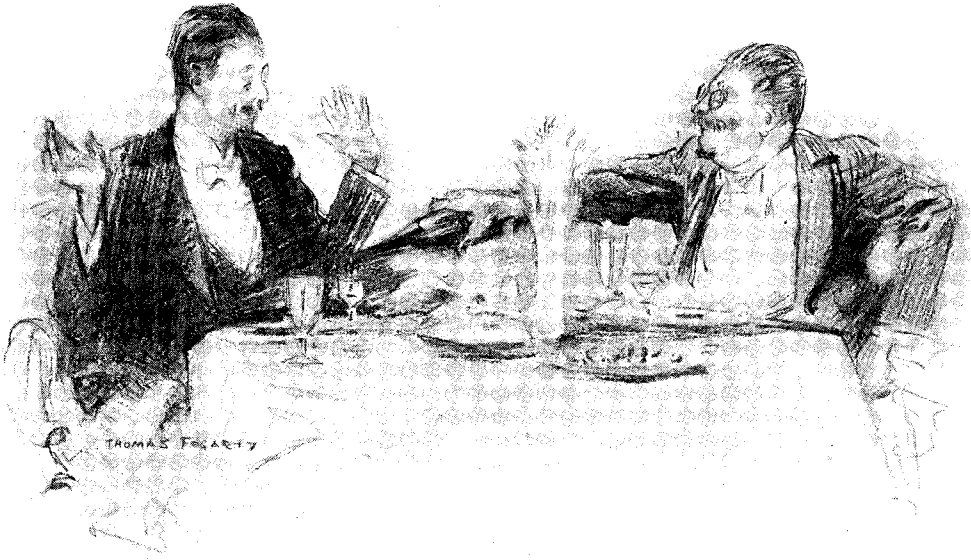
"That's true. But how does this affect Hyems?"

The "Frenchman" rose and said:

"Inspector, I understand that I am technically under arrest. But you have already granted me two favors while in that condition, and I am bold enough to appeal for a third. It is that you all three should accompany me to my room on the third floor and observe the devastating effect of love."

The four men trooped up-stairs, and Vines threw open the door of his bedroom. On his bed lay Mr. Livermore, neatly gagged and bound.

"This is our friend Hyems," remarked



" 'ALLOW ME TO OFFER YOU ZOME OF ZIS SPARKLING VINE' "

Vines. "We will remove the gag. I put it there because I did n't want our dinner disturbed by any fuss or excitement."

He removed the gag and said:

"How are you, Hyems?"

The wild-eyed man on the bed was in a state of collapse. He glanced at the other four men and closed his eyes, muttering:

"Go on. It's a do."

Inspector Hartrigg looked at the man carefully. Then he said:

"My God! you're right. That's Hyems. Skinner and Trout, stay with this man for a few minutes. He's under arrest, remember. I'll call you in a few minutes. Vines, come down to my room again. There are one or two points I'd like to clear up."

"Herr Schmidt" and "M. de la Roche" returned to the room below and surveyed the scene of their repast, and then both laughed.

"Come, a little more of this excellent brandy, Monsieur de la Roche, and then tell me how you accomplished your capture."

They filled their glasses once more.

"It all came fairly easy," explained Vines, "when I had once ingratiated myself with Mrs. Huggins. She's a daisy, that woman. She was full of this story about Livermore and her Maggie; but it

was not till this morning, when the mail came, that I got wise on the real trend of things. Wherever I am, I always like to be right there when the mail's delivered. There's information of all sorts to be picked up even from the outside. This morning there was a long envelop franked and sealed, addressed to 'Herr Schmidt.' I was just crazy to open that communication, and I was just on the point of securing it when Mrs. Huggins came fussing into the hall. I retired to my room again for about fifteen minutes. When I got back to the hall the long envelop addressed to you had vanished, and a stranger was fingering the mail. I called for Mrs. Huggins. When she came, she soon put the stranger to flight with a broom and her tongue. I was a very sympathetic Frenchman, and then it was she told me the whole story of Mr. Livermore and her Maggie. While she was speaking, the whole truth came to me in a flash. I realized that Livermore was Hyems, but I was darned if I could place you. The capture was dead easy. In the hurried removal of Livermore's things last night, our good landlady had overlooked one or two trifles. She had apparently dumped some on that old chest at the top of the kitchen stairs. I found there a small box in which I discovered several notes and

billets doux signed by 'M.' I am no mug at faking caligraphy. That afternoon I despatched a note to Mr. Livermore in the handwriting of M.

'Do come at five-thirty. Mother will be out. Tremendously important. M.'

I underlined 'tremendously important' four times. It was one of the lady's minor characteristics. At five-thirty Mrs. Huggins was very considerably buying me a couple of shirts in the High Street. I was alone in the house. I let Mr. Livermore in. The rest was just dead easy—as easy as skinning a rabbit.

"Herr Fritz" laughed.

"Well, Vines," he said, "I congratulate you. It was a smart piece of work. I feel convinced you are destined to 'make good.' It looks as though our friend would even now be free if he had n't been so enterprising as to rob the mail this morning and steal his own warrant of arrest."

"Ah, so that 's what it was."

"I notified Chief Inspector Shapples yesterday that I had my man under observation, but when I left the Yard the warrant was not complete. The whole thing seemed so simple that he said he 'd post it to me, which is quite an irregular proceeding, but one we occasionally indulge in. When it did not come this morning I judged that you had stolen it, and so I obtained a new one to-day. I must say, in fairness to our service, that you have been watched and followed all day and that you would have found it somewhat difficult to make an escape. I did not arrest you before because I did not wish to miss our little dinner this evening, and I also wanted to glean some information about other parties who are still at large. I thought you were fencing very skilfully, and, if you will allow me to say so, I am glad now that I was quite on the wrong tack."

"Inspector," replied the American, "I have not enjoyed such a dinner for a very, very long time, and I'm real glad to have made your acquaintance."

"After this success I hope the authori-

ties will permit you to assist me in unraveling other little troubles in connection with the case before you return to New York. Here 's to your good health and prosperity!"

"And yours, Inspector, to say nothing of Mrs. Huggins! My, is n't she a peach!"

"You know, dearie," said Mrs. Huggins, three weeks later, in the private bar of the Staff of Life, to her friend Mrs. O'Neil, "it 's a very rum thing about gals. There 's my Mag, now. Lord! how she took on when this 'ere case came up. She was going to do this, that, and the other; but when they reely took 'im away, she calmed down like the lamb she is. And now she 's already walking out with Sandy Waters, as nice a young feller as you could wish to meet. He 's a soldier, you know, an officer; 'e 's got all these 'ere stripes on 'is arm. A quartermaster, that 's what 'e is; gets 'is perks all over the place. Gets quite a good livin', and when 'e goes, she gets 'er maintenance and a bob a day what 'e allots 'er like, to say nothin' of seven and six for the first child, six shillings for the second, three and six for the third, and three bob apiece for the rest; that is, if the war lasts long enough. They 're as sweet on each other as a couple of gumdrops in a glass bottle."

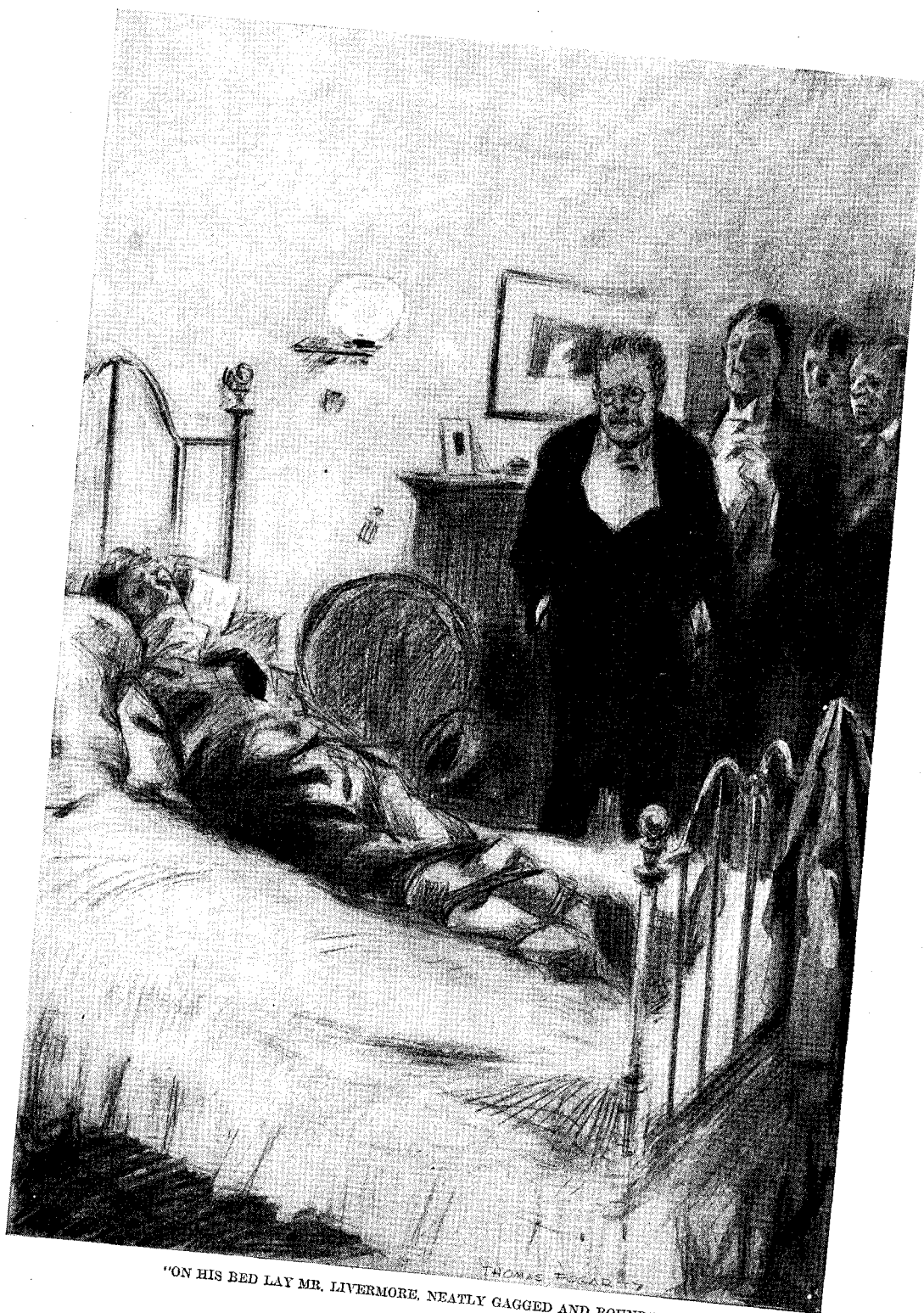
Mrs. O'Neil blew the froth off the stout.

"It 's a wonderful' interestin' case," she said, "what wif all this spyin' and cheatin' and stealin'. Lord! what a narrer escape you 'ad, Mrs. 'Uggins! 'Im comin', too, and stealin' the postman's letters in the mornin'. What a villain!"

Mrs. Huggins coughed, and cleared her throat. Then she looked thoughtfully across her glass and said:

"Well, you know, dearie, it 's rather funny about that part. Of course, you know, it 's nothing departmental to the case, as they say, or I might 'ave spoken out in court about it; but as a matter of fact, 'e never pinched that letter at all."

Mrs. O'Neil looked aghast, and Mrs. Huggins winked mysteriously.



"ON HIS BED LAY MR. LIVERMORE, NEATLY GAGGED AND BOUND"

"No. You see," she whispered, "it was like this 'ere. I was very rushed that mornin', what with the to-do of Mr. Smith's dinner, and that, and I could n't get the b'iler to go. I never take no noos-papers now. There 's nothin' in 'em except about this bloomin' war. I takes my 'Reynold's' on Sunday, but as fire-paper that don't last long. Lately I 've taken to usin' these 'ere circulars what come from the sales, you know—spring goods, white sales, and so on. I never looks at 'em. I simply rips 'em open and shoves 'em into the b'iler fire. On that mornin', being 'ard-pressed as it were, I runs up into the 'all, and seein' circulars there, I cops 'old of 'em and runs down to the scullery. I rips 'em open and shoves 'em in. It was not till I got the b'iler goin' that I realized

that one of the circulars 'ad a great red sealin'-wax blob on the envelop, and it was all official-like. It was too late then, but I thinks to myself: 'I burnt somethin' I did n't ought to then. That was a summons or somethin'.' Soon after that I 'eard the rumpus up-stairs."

"Lord!" exclaimed Mrs. O'Neil. "You run a risk there, Annie."

"As I say," repeated Mrs. Huggins, "it was n't departmental to the case. There was enough proved against 'im to 'ang 'im in this country and quarter 'im in America without draggin' in a silly old envelop like that."

"Well, I 'ope your Mag 'll be 'appy," said Mrs. O'Neil, wiping her mouth.

"My Mag 'll be all right. Don't *you* worry," replied Mrs. Huggins.



